# DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.



CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

Among the last to emerge were Alexis and Ivan—Ilda, with the women, had gone before.

In going to the van in which they were to be conveyed to the railway station to begin their long journey to the mines of Siberia, Ivan and Alexis passed the conveyance where Ilda sat in company with two other women.

They had not seen each other since they had been taken from the office of the minister of police, when Ivan, torn by the soldiers from the arms of Olga, felt, as he received a last farewell embrace, the hapless girl faint in his arms.

"Alexis!"

Hearing the voice, Alexis stopped, and with him Ivan, for they were ironed together.

"Ilda!"

Both spoke at once.

But the one word was the last.

A Cossack guard had overheard them, and with a rough "Prikazano ne gavarit" (talking is forbidden), he pushed them forward with the butt of his rifle and hustled them into the van with scant ceremony.

The cortege started, and in less than half an hour the prisoners had been transferred to the long train of convict cars, the whistle sounded, the train moved, and the dreary journey of the exiles to Siberia had begun.

As the train rolled along, Ivan and Alexis found for the first time an opportunity of exchanging confidences. They had been placed in separate cells in the prison, and knew nothing of what had transpired during the time of their confinement. Of their


destination they were both ignorant, beyond the fact that they were bound for Siberia. They found some consolation, however, in being together, and each tried to comfort the other by expressing a hope that when the truth was known their punishment would not be so severe. One fear, however, possessed them both—that on their arrival in Siberia they would be separated and unable to communicate with each other.

It is a long journey at best from St. Petersburg to Saratov; but in a crowded convict car, with no conveniences, with a hot, stifling atmosphere, and in the company of some of the worst characters in Russia—for with refined cruelty the political exiles were compelled to associate with malefactors of all kinds—it was, as Alexis afterward described it, a horrible nightmare while awake.

Up to their arrival in Saratov, Ivan and Alexis had been allowed to wear the ordinary dress, although Alexis, immediately after his arrival in the Petropavlosk prison, had been compelled to give up his uniform and don the garb of a civilian. Now, however, they had arrived at the depot for those destined for Siberia, and they were soon made aware that henceforth they would live under changed conditions.

Two or three days after their arrival at Saratov, a rumor spread among the prisoners that the convoy for Siberia was about to start on the following morning, and this proved to be true, for the order was issued to prepare to march. As a preliminary the convicts were divided into two classes—the politicals and the criminals—other than those convicted of offenses of a political nature. Of the first there were two classes—the sylni or simple exiles, whose offenses were designated under the general term of "untrustworthiness"—and the hard-labor class, who were convicted of some overt act against the peace and dignity of the czar. Some of the prisoners were taken to the barber shop, where one side of the head was shaved bare; and the hair an the other side being allowed to remain, they presented, when their caps were removed, a pitifully grotesque appearance. To the strong leather belt which confined their greatcoats at the waist were attached two chains which reached to the ankles, where they were riveted to the ankle irons.

Alexis and Ivan were fortunate in being exempted from the degradation of having their hair cut in the manner described, but in all other respects they were treated as the other convicts. They tried to gain information from the guards as to Ilda, but it was without avail, and they were left in uncertainty as to her fate. But they were not long in suspense.

Early on the following morning a bugle sound rang through the prison, and a few minutes later all were active. Orders were issued in quick, sharp tones to the prisoners to be ready to march, and after a hasty breakfast of the regulation fare—black bread and barley soup—the prisoners were drawn up in line in the courtyard. A list of their names were called, their irons examined, each prisoner shouldered his canvas bag and then, led by a detachment of soldiers and guarded on both sides and the rear, the column of "unfortunates"—the general term for exiles in Russia—was ordered to march. The outer gates opened and the prisoners were on their way to the landing place, where a steamer was in waiting to carry them up the Volga to Kasan.

Among the three hundred and odd prisoners there were some thirty-five women—some of them being the wives of exiles, who elected to share their husband's fate; some who were being deported for political activity, and others who had been guilty of crime. As the column started, Alexis and Ivan, who had managed to still be together—a favor granted to them by reason of a trifling bribe to one of the guards—recognized Ilda in her dress of an exile. That Ilda also recognized them they were sure, although she made no sign, fearing to betray a desire to get nearer to them—a movement that would have been prevented because desired.

But when they reached the steamer they were rewarded for their self-denial, and for the first time since they had been separated at the doors of the prison in St. Petersburg they found an opportunity to converse freely. This gave them a chance to agree upon a cypher mode of communication which they felt would prove useful in the probable event of their early separation.

Alexis was by far the most cheerful of the three, and did all in his power to comfort his companions. "I feel sure," he said, "that my father when he discovers the true facts will relent and that our pardons are only a question of time. But I have a stronger ground for hope. I do not believe that Gen. Cobb will desert me, and I feel sure that even now he is at work on our behalf. Keep up a brave heart, dear Ilda, and be assured that happiness is yet in store for us all."

The steamer with its load of human freight went on up the broad Volga until Kasan was reached. Here a short delay occurred, but in a few hours the exiles were transferred to another steamer, their destination being Perm, on the River Kama. They were now rapidly approaching the Siberian frontier. On their arrival at Perm, they were marched to a train of cars in waiting, and without further delay were forwarded on their journey.

At the end of the railway line the prisoners were disembarked and taken to the receiving prison, where they were to rest a few days before beginning their long march of weeks, perhaps months, to the mines of Siberia. It was while at this place that Alexis, Ilda and Ivan learned of their destination. Ivan and Alexis were to go to Chitka, the capital of the province of the Trans-Baikal, a place on the bank of the Ingoda river, one of the tributaries of the Amoor. Ilda learned that at this point she would be separated from her companions. She was to go some two hundred miles further—to Stralensk.

We may pass over the long and dreary march of the exiles for weeks and months in their journey over the great highway of Siberia. It is a painful story—a story full of tears. The scanty food, the foul air of the kamaras or prison pens, the long marches on foot day by day—these need not further be referred to. Suffice it to say that the journey was accomplished at last, and the exiles were at their destination.

By great good fortune the commandant of the district where Ivan and Alexis found themselves was an old soldier who had served under Count Nazimoff in the Turkish war, and he felt pity for the son of his old commander. Alexis was allowed many privileges not accorded to ordinary convicts, and the horrors of exile were, by his intercession, also softened for Ivan. Ilda, they heard, had been assigned to duty by the governor at Stralensk as a nurse, and she had also an opportunity to earn something beyond the scanty government allowance by teaching the governor's children.

Ilda had been but a short time in Stralensk when an opportunity was afforded her for materially improving her condition. A violent epidemic of typhus fever had broken out, not only among the convicts, but among the officials themselves. With a noble disregard of her own safety, Ilda exposed herself to every risk, and to her watchful care and skillful nursing was due the saving of the lives of the governor's wife and children. The gratitude of the governor's wife knew no bounds, and it was at her suggestion that Ilda was given quarters, instead of being confined in the women's department of the prison, in the governor's house. She had been here now two months, and was regarded with feelings of grateful esteem by all classs—prisoners and officials alike. Stralensk is on the main road to the mines of Nertchensk, and since the arrival of Ilda several convoys of prisoners had passed through the place en route to the destination at the mines. As the long columns of unfortunates wound their weary way along the valley of the Nertcha, Ilda had many opportunities to perform little acts of kindness to suffering prisoners. It was while binding the bruised foot of a poor woman who had suffered terribly on the march that Ilda was startled by the sufferer asking if she knew any prisoner named Ilda Barosky.

Ilda's heart beat fast. She had not heard from Alexis or Ivan since she was separated from them to continue her journey, and while she knew that they had been stopped at Chitka, she believed that they had only been halted there, preparatory to being sent further into the interior, perhaps to the dreaded mines of Karc. Ilda revealed her name to the stranger, who produced a paper. It proved to be but a single work "Nadeshda" (Hope), but it was as a very message of future happiness for the girl, for she recognized the hand of Alexis. She learned that the scrap of paper had been handed to the woman at a point some three hundred miles away, where a survey was being made for a new road, and by further questioning found out that Alexis and Ivan had been given employment in that way—so far as the woman could describe the man who had given her the scrap of paper, and who had but a moment to ask her to deliver it to Ilda Barosky, if they should meet.

Thus the months passed away—the exiles waiting, watching, with anxious hearts for a word of hope from those nearest and dearest to them. In Siberia, they knew that they could not even if they so desired, hope to remain as they willed for any length of time in the place in which they were. The whim of an officer in authority; the command of an ispravnik—the sub-governor or mayor of the smaller towns; a draft for more laborers for the mines—any of these causes might compel them to change their residence at a moment's notice, and go to a point, hundreds, if not thousands, of miles distant. Hence our friends were kept in a constant state of fear and suspense, lest at any moment an order might issue which would place them further apart—perhaps never to meet again.

It must not be supposed that Alexis and Ivan had calmly reconciled themselves to their fate, and had passively accepted the misfortune that it had been their lot to endure. The thoughts by day and the dreams by night of exiles of Siberia are of escape, and Ivan and Alexis were no exceptions to the rule. They had discussed many plans, but one after another had been dismissed as impracticable. For it was not alone for themselves that they planned. They had determined never


to leave Siberia without Ilda and the hapless Olga.

In spite of every effort, no word of the fate of Olga had reached them, and Ivan was in an agony of apprehension regarding her. But one thought consoled him. He knew that the Baroness von Rhineberg would do everything in her power to mitigate the sufferings of the unhappy girl, and he knew, too, that he would certainly hear some news as soon as any information of his location could reach the baroness—if it ever did.

(To be continued.)

### Laid by Lincoln Admirer.

A Michigan man is preparing to reshingle his house for the first time since 1860, the year Lincoln was elected. In removing the old hand-shaved shingles, on one, protected by the overlap of its neighbor, were found the words: "Hurrah for old Abe!"

### Spared for Years of Usefulness.

Owen Wister, author of "The Virginian" and other successful works has just recovered from an operation for appendicitis performed several weeks ago at the Pennsylvania Medical college of Philadelphia.